



HOLY LAND COMMISSARIAT

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To the people of the Church in Australia, for the Holy Land Collection 2026

As many of you are aware, for 800 years the Franciscan Friars have shared the difficult lives of Christians in the countries that make up the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land: Israel and Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, Rhodes and Cyprus. The people of these countries face their own difficulties, but particularly Christians due to their minority status. Among them, the friars have never ceased offering their pastoral care and practical support.

Over recent years, with the Covid Pandemic and wars in Syria and then Gaza, the people of the Holy Land have endured tremendous turmoil. Even now, the hope for a lasting peace remains very uncertain and the task of rebuilding lives and infrastructure seems overwhelming.

Just recently last November, I had the privilege of attending the international meeting of Holy Land Commissaries in Jerusalem. There our group heard from the local people and of what the Franciscan Friars are doing (and have never stopped doing) in support of them. We heard stories of courage and resilience and encountered Christians yearning for a future for their children. From them and Church leaders came the plea for peace and hope. They also pleaded for pilgrims to return. Pilgrims are vital as they generate income that allows the Friars and local Church to fulfil their mission of caring for the Holy Places, running parishes and schools, and caring for orphans, refugees, the homeless, and other social projects. Pilgrims also give much needed employment to local people, allowing Christian families to remain present in the land where Christianity was born.

This year, Fr. Francesco Ielpo OFM, the Franciscan leader of the Holy Land Custody reminds us of the urgent need to continue supporting the Holy Land, especially in the light of recent happenings:

The last few years have been particularly difficult for the Christian communities of the Middle East. The war has brought death, destruction, and fear, not only to Gaza, but also to the West Bank, Israel, Lebanon, and Syria. The suffering caused by the conflict has been compounded by the prolonged absence of pilgrims, which has exacerbated an already profound economic and employment crisis. Many Christian families, who once relied on the Holy Places and pilgrimage-related activities, are now experiencing great difficulty.

We have just concluded the Jubilee Year of Hope, and hope itself appears to be damaged: in Bethlehem, Jerusalem, and Northern Israel, as well as in the Christian communities of Lebanon and Syria. The lack of security and employment makes it increasingly difficult to support families and, even more so, to imagine a future for young people and the new generations.

Brothers and sisters, the Good Friday Holy Land Collection remains extremely important and a mission in which we can all participate. The hope is that our Australian parishioners, Parish Priests and Bishops will again be as generous as they have always been. Our donation is a direct way to make a difference in the lives of people who are keeping alive the Christian presence in the land of Jesus in the face of great difficulty. On their behalf, I humbly and wholeheartedly thank you all.

Mario Debattista ofm

Friar Mario Debattista OFM
Commissary of the Holy Land (Australia)

